



SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME

FACT SHEET

Information for SARS Patients and Their Close Contacts

SARS

Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) is a viral respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus, called SARS-associated coronavirus (SARS-CoV). SARS was first reported in Asia in February 2003. Over the next few months, the illness spread to more than two dozen countries in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. The SARS global outbreak of 2003 was contained; however, it is possible that the disease could re-emerge. This fact sheet gives information about the illness and important instructions for preventing the spread of SARS. To find out more about SARS, go to www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/ and www.who.int/csr/sars/en/.

The SARS outbreak

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), during the SARS outbreak of 2003, a total of 8,098 people worldwide became sick with SARS; of these, 774 died. In the United States, there were 192 cases of SARS, none of which were fatal. Most of the U.S. SARS cases were among travelers returning from other parts of the world with SARS. There were very few U.S. cases among close contacts of travelers, including health-care workers and family members. SARS did not spread more widely in the community in the United States.

Symptoms of SARS

In general, SARS begins with a high fever (temperature greater than 100.4°F [$>38.0^{\circ}\text{C}$]). Other symptoms may include headache, an overall feeling of discomfort, and body aches. Some people also have mild respiratory symptoms at the outset. About 10 percent to 20 percent of patients have diarrhea. After 2 to 7 days, SARS patients may develop a dry cough. Most patients develop pneumonia.

How SARS spreads

The main way that SARS seems to spread is by close person-to-person contact. The virus that causes SARS is thought to be transmitted most readily by respiratory droplets (droplet spread) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplet spread can happen when droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled a short distance (generally up to 3 feet) through the air and deposited on the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose, or eyes of persons who are nearby. The virus also can spread when a person touches a surface or object contaminated with infectious droplets and then touches his or her mouth, nose, or eye(s). In addition, it is possible that the SARS virus might spread more broadly through the air (airborne spread) or by other ways that are not now known.

What does "close contact" mean?

In the context of SARS, close contact means having cared for or lived someone with SARS or having direct contact with respiratory secretions or body fluids of a patient with SARS. Examples of close contact include kissing or hugging, sharing eating or drinking utensils, talking to someone within 3 feet, and touching someone directly. Close contact does not include activities like walking by a person or sitting across a waiting room or office for a brief time.

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Steps to protect yourself and the people around you

CDC has issued guidelines for both SARS patients and their close contacts in health-care and home settings. If you have SARS, or you have close contact with someone who does, follow these instructions:

If you think you (or someone in your family) might have SARS, you should:

- Consult a health-care provider as soon as possible. Call ahead and tell them before you visit so they can take precautions to keep from exposing other people.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing. If you have a surgical mask, wear it during close contact with other people. A mask can reduce the number of droplets coughed into the air.

If you have SARS and are being cared for at home, you should:

- Follow the instructions given by your health-care provider.
- Limit your activities outside the home. For example, do not go to work, school, or public areas.
- Wash your hands often and well, especially after you have blown your nose.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when you sneeze or cough.
- If possible, wear a surgical mask when around other people in your home. If you can't wear a mask, the members of your household should wear one when they are around you.
- Don't share silverware, towels, or bedding with anyone in your home until these items have been washed with soap and hot water.
- Clean surfaces (counter or tabletops, door knobs, bathroom fixtures, etc.) that have been contaminated by body fluids (sweat, saliva, mucous, or even vomit or urine) from the SARS patient with a household disinfectant used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Wear disposable gloves during all cleaning activities. Throw these out when you are done. Do not reuse them.
- Follow these instructions for 10 days after your fever and respiratory symptoms have gone away.

If you are caring for someone at home who has SARS, you should:

- Be sure that the person with SARS has seen a health-care provider and is following instructions for medication and care.
- Be sure that all members of your household are washing their hands frequently with soap and hot water or using alcohol-based hand wash.
- Wear disposable gloves if you have direct contact with body fluids of a SARS patient. However, the wearing of gloves is not a substitute for good hand hygiene. After contact with body fluids of a SARS patient, remove the gloves, throw them out, and wash your hands. Do not wash or reuse the gloves.
- Encourage the person with SARS to cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If possible, the person with SARS should wear a surgical mask during close contact with other people in the home. If the person with SARS cannot wear a surgical mask, other members of the household should wear one when in the room with that person.
- Do not use silverware, towels, bedding, clothing, or other items that have been used by the person with SARS until these items have been washed with soap and hot water.
- Clean surfaces (counter or tabletops, door knobs, bathroom fixtures, etc.) that have been contaminated by body fluids (sweat, saliva, mucous, or even vomit or urine) with a household disinfectant used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Wear disposable gloves during all cleaning activities. Throw these out when done. Do not reuse them.

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- Follow these instructions for 10 days after the sick person's fever and respiratory symptoms have gone away.
- If you develop a fever or respiratory symptoms, contact your health care provider immediately and tell him or her that you have had close contact with a SARS patient.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)